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Travels with Epicurus

By Daniel Klein

Daniel Klein is an American writer of fiction, non-fiction, and humour (1939-)

Travels with Epicurus was published in 2014. Klein wrote this book when he was 73. The author states that he is trying to work out the most satisfying way to live this stage of his life. He has chosen to spend a holiday on a Greek island and hopes the older inhabitants and his accompanying library of philosophical works will offer clues.

The book reflects upon ageing and the potential pleasures of old age. It draws on philosophical musings from ancient and modern philosophers. The context is that it is another piece of self-improvement advice that we constantly experience all around us. How to strive to live better, eat better, travel more, be fitter and healthier. This, however, is maybe the antidote.

The author is attracted to Epicurus who was born on Samos about 350 BCE. He advocated a life filled with pleasure, "the pursuit of happiness" as Jefferson wrote. Easy to say but for Epicurus it meant simple pleasures, of which the prime one was friendship. And old age allows one to avoid pressures to conform but to be comfortable with simple needs. To forego the bucket list and enjoy being old. He is anxious that we consider an authentic old age before the dreaded *old* old age. To some this is anathema and would be selfish. To the author it may be the sweetness of freedom to answer only to oneself. The book is rich in quotes. Perhaps the most relevant is; *"it is not the young man who should be considered fortunate but the old man who has lived well, because the young man in his prime wanders much by chance, vacillating in the his beliefs, while the old man has docked in his harbour, having safeguarded his own happiness."*

There are many musings; on chronological time versus lived time. On boredom: how we have been taught to combat boredom with purpose but alternatively we can fill it with play where the only object is play (Bertrand Russell, "in praise of idleness"). On the pleasure of pure thinking and the value of reflecting back on one's life, to derive a sense of fulfilment rather than regret and bitterness. On the danger of denying we are ageing and missing the period of old age.

The author concludes by suggesting that to be simply aware of the old age options on offer means at least we can make authentic choices. We can try the ideas on for size. And what can be wrong with that